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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Priests for Life, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.

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Statement*

1. We would like to thank the Commission on the Status of Women for focusing on the critical areas which impact women's lives around the world and recognize that advancements in the basic areas of education, job training and access to technology are ways to improve the impoverished lives of women.

2. Employment helps women to improve their lives and rise from poverty. The astounding success of microcredit loans across the developing world amply illustrates the benefits of giving women the chance to use their skills and economic empowerment results from access to vocational training and job opportunities.

3. A woman who has a source of income is able to put food on the table, educate her children and afford health care. She receives respect from others in the community who look to her for leadership resulting in political involvement and opportunities to help others in her community and beyond.

4. It is the currently accepted wisdom across the spectrum of ideologies that when women and girls have access to education, it is not only their lives that improve, but the lives of their children and community. Education needs to be available to all girls and women to reduce the unacceptably high female illiteracy rate. Education not only empowers women with reading, writing skills and math skills but results in self-confidence and empowerment which helps women assume leadership roles in their communities. Education provides the most effective path out of poverty.

5. Women who receive educational opportunities are healthier and their children are healthier. Educated women have healthier pregnancies and safer deliveries resulting in healthier newborns and in reductions in both maternal and child mortality. Educated women are able to make better decisions for themselves and their children.

6. The areas of education and employment are critical to improving lives and programmes in these areas must provide for the unique childbearing capacity of women. Pregnant girls must be allowed to receive an education and pregnant women must not be threatened with job loss. Women must be allowed to fulfil their innate capacity to bear children without penalty.

7. Abortion is not an acceptable solution to meeting the educational and employment needs of women. The destruction of a woman's child through the violence of the abortion act does not result in true empowerment. Rather, any so-called "reproductive freedom" gained through abortion only anaesthetizes and deadens the nurturing souls of women, forcing them to accept oppression of their procreative lives.

8. Abortion does little to affirm the dignity of women — instead it separates their sexuality from the intrinsic act of procreation and reduces them to mere machines to satisfy male pleasure, with no connection to the emotional and spiritual forces that are intrinsic to women's identity.

9. Abortion can be emotionally crippling. Increasingly, women who suffer the repercussions of abortion often describe it as violent and brutal. There is grief, sadness, shame and anger. They resort to self-destructive behaviours and numb

* Issued without formal editing.

themselves with alcohol and drugs. Some re-enact their trauma through promiscuity and repeat abortions, trapped in a cycle of abandonment, rejection, a sense of helplessness and abuse. The Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, recently revealed that 50 per cent of all women who have an abortion will go on to have another. Others attempt to repress their feelings through eating disorders, depression, anxiety and attempted suicide.

10. True women's rights and freedom will never exist until women's reproductive capacity is valued and their children are cherished by society and the men who father them. Violence against women will never end until society recognizes the benefits of fashioning life, instead of insisting upon its necessary destruction.

11. Health care in any form, including maternal health or reproductive health, that includes access to abortion is not really health care at all. Abortion ends the life of one patient and may injure the other physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. The dualistic rhetoric of abortion rights splits mind from body, sexuality from procreation, pleasure from loving passion, and mother from child. Health care that includes abortion threatens women and their children with violence and abandonment.

12. Abortion on demand has created a mindset that killing is the solution to unwanted responsibility — not just for the baby, but for the woman who will not exercise her "freedom of choice". Men who refuse to accept their responsibility are enabled by abortion to abandon women and treat them with disrespect and contempt often leading to acts of violence and abuse. Gender violence plagues the lives of women around the world as far too many women suffer abuse and violence on a daily basis.

13. Cultural practices which devalue the life of the girl child and deny her an education must be stopped. Employment practices which discriminate against women must end.

14. Initiatives which seek to deny or destroy the inherent procreative ability of women do not advance or empower women. Rather, programmes which include access to abortion treat women's unique capabilities as a problem rather than recognizing the universally valued role of women as the bearers of a country's future, its children.

15. Woman-centred initiatives for empowerment which include abortion are unacceptable and distract from meeting the real needs of women. Our energies must focus on the daily struggles women face not only in accessing education and employment but also to ensure access to clean water and adequate nutrition, access to life-affirming health care, the provision of skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care, protection of children, aid to those suffering from HIV/AIDS, support for victims of violence, the rescuing of women trapped in trafficking, laws to allow women to own and inherit land, and enforcement of child support laws. Progress in these areas would do infinitely more for women than insisting on universal access to abortion.

16. The lives of women need to be valued and respected. Women should not have to deny their feminine nature, be made to feel second class to men, or be penalized for their unique procreative capacity.

17. Women should be affirmed for their female nature; their lives should be respected throughout the life cycle and they should be assisted in the critical role of mother. Education and employment should be available to women and girls while affirming and providing for — and not penalizing — their unique role and capacity.